

*Before jeet kune do, before the Oakland and Los Angeles years, before The Green Hornet and Enter the Dragon, there were the Seattle years, when Bruce Lee was merely a newcomer to the United States who still practiced the wing chun kung fu he had learned in Hong Kong. Lee first taught privately, then later opened a school in Seattle, and it is Jesse Glover who is widely considered the "Dragon's" first student. The two became close friends, and Glover developed into a strong and talented kung fu stylist. In this rare interview, purportedly Glover's first with a martial arts publication, he reminisces about his training with the legendary Lee and recalls some of their more memorable moments together, including the day Bruce got into a fight with a karate practitioner.* —Ed.

**BLACK BELT:** Where did your training sessions with Bruce Lee take place?

**JESSE GLOVER:** When I learned from Bruce, it was during practice sessions on street corners, at school, in movie theaters during intermission, and in my living room.

**BB:** What did Lee teach you the first time you practiced together?

**GLOVER:** The first night of my training, I began to learn the first *wing chun* [kung fu] form and *chi sao* [sticking-hands exercise]. In the days that followed, I learned many things from other systems as Bruce experimented with different attacks and defenses. When Bruce opened his school [in Seattle], he was teaching and not experimenting. Few of his students ever did *chi sao* or a lot of the other things that I did during the first few months that I knew him.

**BB:** Did Lee teach a variety of martial arts at the Seattle school?

**GLOVER:** You have to understand that, in the beginning, it was Bruce's plan to teach different forms to different students to show the vastness of Chinese kung fu. Much of the material that people learned in class was directed toward this goal. Outside of a few basic techniques like a slap block, backfist, straight punch, "peacock eye," low kick and *chop choy*, most of what the students learned were forms.

**BB:** Was Lee disappointed when you stopped training at the school?

**GLOVER:** I don't know. All I know is, whenever I came around [the school], he was always friendly. He showed me what he was doing in terms of kung fu, and talked about the direction of his progress.

## Meet Bruce Lee's First Student



## Jesse Glover Recalls His Days With the "Dragon"

Interview by Paul Bax

**BB:** What is the single-most-important fighting principle you learned from Lee?

**GLOVER:** Close [in] on the guy, and get [the fight] over with.

**BB:** Do you think that, if Lee had learned the entire wing chun system before venturing out on his own, he never would have so drastically changed his approach to fighting?

**GLOVER:** No, I don't think that learning the whole [wing chun] system would have made much difference unless Bruce had stayed in Hong Kong. It was the size of the people in the United States, the lack of instruction, and his desire to surpass his seniors that made him change his approach to fighting. People have to realize that the brand of wing chun that Bruce found most useful were the techniques that the leading fighters in the [wing chun] clan actually used in fights.

**BB:** Do you think if Lee were alive, he would approve of all the additions people have made to his system of *jeet kune do*?

**GLOVER:** Well, in my mind, Bruce was *jeet kune do*. I have never seen anyone else who could move like him. If anyone can do *jeet kune do*, it's Howard Williams from the Oakland (California) period. Howard trained under Bruce and James Lee when he was a teenager, and *jeet kune do* is all that he has done. He has good reflexes and is a powerful man. He can make Bruce's stuff

work. There aren't many who can.

**BB:** Is there still a lot of interest in Lee's original teachings, or have they been forgotten in favor of his *jeet kune do*?

**GLOVER:** I think there is an increasing interest in what Bruce did during his early years but, clearly, *jeet kune do* is very popular. What I learned from Bruce is not what he taught in formal classes. [Seattle-based instructor] Taky Kimura is the expert on what Bruce taught in his formal classes after the original group had broken up. I don't know what Taky teaches, but I'm sure that it is exactly what Bruce taught him.

**BB:** What did you think about the recent film *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*?

**GLOVER:** Not much. I didn't think it had much to do with Bruce and his [martial arts] development. Bruce was a great martial artist who put his stuff together step by step. The movie didn't show this aspect at all. The fight scenes looked like something out of a Jackie Chan movie. Bruce would have never done stuff like that. He never would have stood up and openly challenged people like they had him do in the movie. The time frame and

settings were also all wrong. The movie had him in Hong Kong in 1961. I was learning from him in [Seattle in] 1959. The fight at the restaurant never took place. Bruce's family wasn't poor, he wasn't the oldest or only son, and his mother is still alive. I think Bruce would have found this movie portrayal very insulting.

**BB:** You, of course, heard about the tragic death of Lee's son, Brandon, last year on a movie set. Did you know Brandon at all?

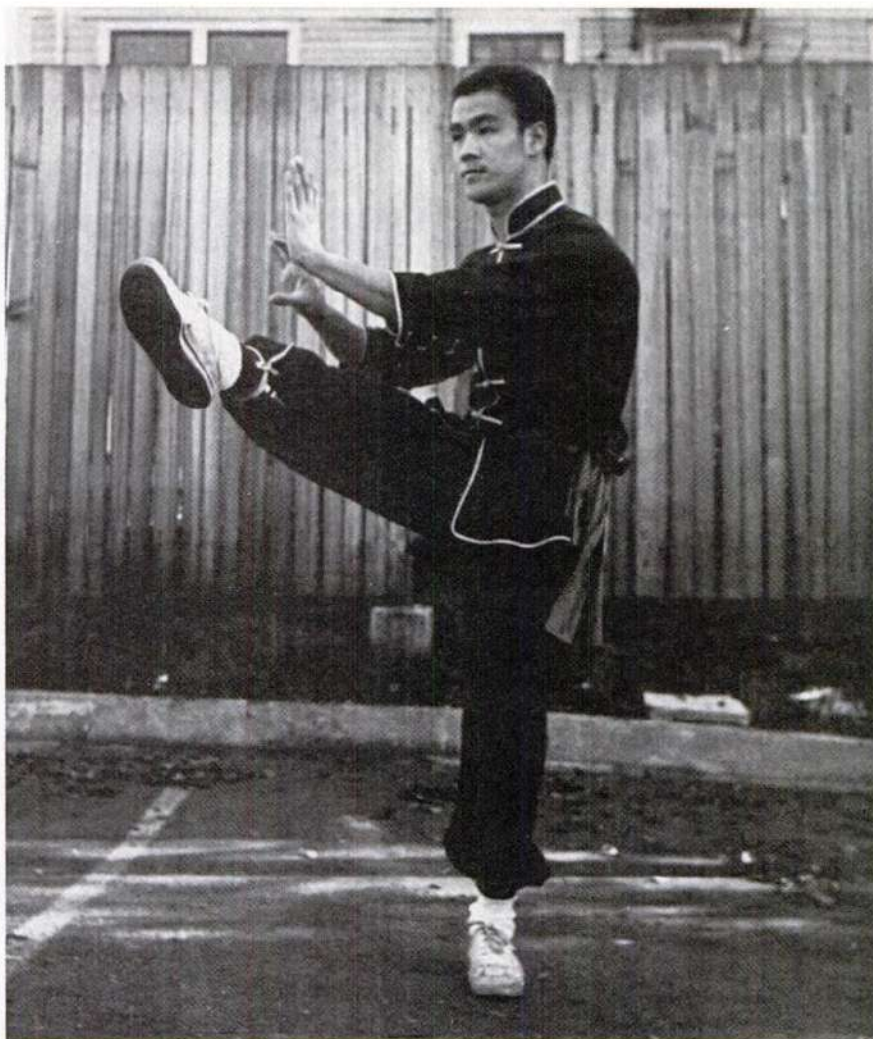
**GLOVER:** I met Brandon when he was only a few months old. There wasn't any real connection there, except that he was Bruce's son. I was following his development as an actor, and I thought that he was improving with each picture. I am sure that he would have continued to develop into a first-rate actor. I thought that he had a great sense of humor and wit. It is too bad that he died so young. I salute his mother [Linda Lee Cadwell] in the face of such adversity. No one should have to endure two such devastating blows in one lifetime.

**BB:** What do you think about the theories that a conspiracy was involved in the deaths of Bruce and Brandon Lee?

**GLOVER:** I think there has been a pretty thorough investigation into it. [Brandon's death] was just a fluke. These kinds of things have happened before, and whenever they have, someone has always tried to make something out of it when it involved a famous person. There are always people who want to believe in conspiracy theories.

**BB:** When was the last time you saw Bruce Lee alive?

**GLOVER:** It must have been 1965 or 1966. It was either at his birthday party, or when he brought Brandon over to my house. Bruce and I spent most of the time at his party in the basement talking. He



BLACK BELT PHOTO

**Bruce Lee (above), attired in traditional kung fu garb, conducts wing chun forms training in a Seattle parking lot.**

told me about his fight with Wong Jak Man, and his new training ideas. He told me that, after the fight, he had started to incorporate roadwork, more footwork, and more kicking into his fighting method.

the guy. Then one day Bruce caught me coming out of class, and he told me he was going to fight the guy. He wanted to fight him on the top floor of the school, but I talked him into fighting at the downtown YMCA. There were seven people at the fight: Bruce, the karate man, Ed Hart, Howard Hall, Masafusa Kimura (an exchange student from Japan), another



BLACK BELT PHOTO

**Martial arts class members, including Jesse Glover (back row, fifth from left), pose with Bruce Lee (back row, sixth from left) in a photo from the 1960s.**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JESSE GLOVER



exchange student whose name I didn't know, and me. I was the referee. The rules of the fight were: three two-minute rounds, and if a guy got knocked down, that would end the round. If one person couldn't continue, the other person would end the fight. Bruce wanted to go all out, but I convinced him that he might kill his opponent. So he agreed to only use his fists and feet. The karate man began the fight in a classical karate stance, but switched to a "cat" stance. Bruce was standing in a classical wing chun stance. The karate man threw a front kick, and Bruce blocked it with a forearm block. He followed his block with a series of straight punches, which drove the man across the room. When the man ran into the wall, he tried to grab Bruce, but Bruce spun and hit him with a double punch to the chest and head. The guy flew through the air, and Bruce chased him. Bruce threw a kick the instant the karate man's

**Jesse Glover and a bespectacled Bruce Lee conduct an impromptu training session (1&2) in the living room in these rare photos.**

knee touched the floor. I yelled for them to stop, and the karate man fell back unconscious on the floor. He took a long time to regain consciousness, and for a time, I thought he was dead. The left side of his face looked like it had been hit by baseball bats. Later we found out his skull was cracked all around the eye socket.

**BB:** What did the karate stylist do after the fight?

**GLOVER:** He tried to become Bruce's personal student, but Bruce told him that he would have to practice in class like everyone else. [Apparently], the guy did come to class for a while. I wasn't attending class at this time, so I don't know. I do

*Continued on page 104*

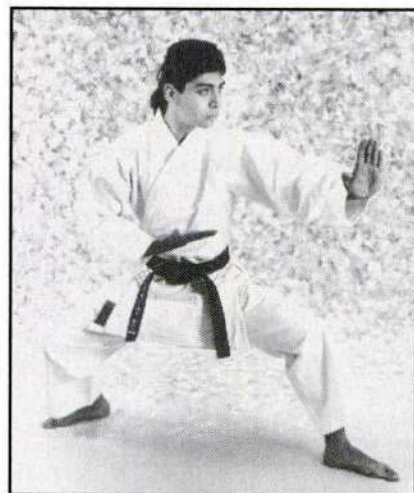


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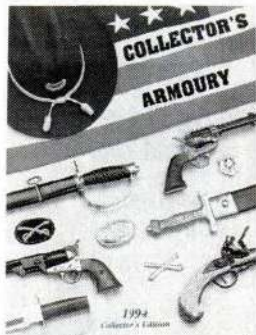
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# Q & A With Jessie Glover

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BLACK BELT PHOTOS

**Bruce Lee often practiced the sticking hands exercise while blindfolded (1) to heighten his sensitivity skills. His first formal training in wing chun came from noted Hong Kong-based instructor Yip Man, who practices (2) sticking hands here with Bruce.**

know that when Bruce told me about this guy wanting to become a student, he didn't trust him.

**BB:** How do you feel about all the people today who claim to teach Bruce Lee's concepts?

**GLOVER:** I don't know exactly what they do, but I do know that, without the development of adequate physical skills, no one can fight with [just] concepts. The techniques and concepts Bruce advocated later in his life were based on the early development of some very practical physical skills. Bruce could punch hard, kick hard and move very quickly, but the thing that made him so effective was the fact that he was a natural counter-mover. He could pick up [an opponent's] potential movement before it happened. Many of his advanced concepts were based on this type of detection. The question is: How much of his thinking at this stage of his development is transferable to the average person? ✕

About the author: Paul Bax is an Imperial, Missouri-based freelance writer and martial artist.



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